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A Rotating 400 Run Our Policy

By Richard J. Barnet

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"THE COUNTRY IS looking for a scapegoat. First it was the draft, then recruiters, then Dow Chemical and now it's the bloody generals," Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam, complained to an interviewer from Time. Many military officers view the belated but growing concern in Congress over uncontrolled military expenditure as an attack on the uniform. In a sense, it is.

When Gen. William Westmoreland appeared in full regalia before Congress to make claims about the Vietnam war which no one with a working television set could believe, the credibility gap assumed cavernous proportions. For the first time in a generation, the leaders of the military establishment have been challenged to produce facts and rational arguments to justify their claim to the biggest bite of the tax dollar. Credentials alone are no longer enough.

Neither, one hopes, are the traditional national security slogans about the Soviet threat or the Chinese threat, no matter how bloodcurdling the rhetoric. Foolishness and waste, in the Pentagon, the inevitable by-products of any institution with too much money to spend, are finally under attack. A patriotic American can only hope the attack will grow.

Nevertheless, the uniformed military are not the primary target of a serious political effort to shift from the economy of death to the economy of life. The principal militarists in America wear three-button suits. They are civilians in everything but outlook. Not the generals but the national security managers—the politicians, businessmen and civil servants who rotate through the paneled offices of the

State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Atomic Energy Commission and the White House—have been in charge of national security policy.

Unseasoned Generals

INDEED, THERE is considerable evidence that the civilian managers, particularly at the beginning of the postwar period, have been far readier than the military to commit American forces to actual combat.

Apprenticed to the military in World War II, the top civilian national security elite absorbed the basic military outlook but not the soldier's professional caution. Perhaps because they lacked combat experience, they underestimated the difficulties and risks in using military power.

In 1946, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cooled the State Department's enthusiasm for sending an ultimatum to Yugoslavia for shooting down an American plane. In the earliest days of the Cold War, it was the State Department that kept urging a big military buildup to furnish "support for our political position," while the Defense Department set more modest goals for itself.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson, not the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the first recommendations to commit U.S. military forces to repel the Korean invasion. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, chief of staff of the Army, opposed John Foster Dulles' proposal to intervene militarily in Indochina in 1954. The Joint Chiefs opposed Walt Rostow's plan to invade Laos in 1961.

The military did not recommend commitment of forces either to aid the Hungarian revolution or to tear down the Berlin Wall. When David Lillenthal, the civilian chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1949 what uses they would have for a hydrogen bomb, they couldn't think of one. The civilians directed the military to think harder.

The Managerial View

WHO ARE THE KEY civilian foreign policy decision-makers? How does one get to be a national security manager? Why do they think as they

The questions are important, for the interests and beliefs which these men bring to their high office decide for the rest of us what the national interest is. "Foreign policies are not built on abstractions. They are the result of practical conceptions of national interest," Charles Evans Hughes noted when he was Secretary of State. The key word is "practical." One man's Utopia is another man's hell. Like the flag, the national interest can mean many different things to different people.

In postwar America, there has been a 25-year consensus on the national interest. There is money for weapons, but not for people. Social decay must be accepted as the price of power. Security is to be achieved by preparing for the worst in meeting foreign threats and assuming that the crisis of our own society will take care of itself.

Who has decided that this is what the national interest is all about?

Since 1940, about 400 individuals have held the top civilian national security positions. These men have defined the threats for the nation, made the commitments that were supposed to meet these threats and determined the size of the armed forces.

They have been above electoral politics. With few exceptions, the men who have designed the bipartisan foreign policy have never held elective office. Their skills have not been those of the politician, who must at least give the appearance of solving problems or reconciling competing interests if he hopes to get re-elected, but those of the crisis manager.

Dean Rusk characterized his personal goal in office as Secretary of State as handing the Berlin crisis over to his successor in no worse shape than he found it. This is the managerial or "keep the ball bouncing" view of statecraft characteristic of those who count on being somewhere else when the ball drops.

Rooted in Business

IF WE TAKE a look at the men who have held the very top positions, the Secretaries and Under Secretaries of State and Defense, the Secretaries of the three services, the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and the director of the CIA, we find that out of 91 individuals who held these offices during the period 1940-67, 70 of them were from the ranks of big business or high finance, including eight out of 10 Secretaries of Defense, seven out of eight Secretaries of the Air Force, every Secretary of the Navy, eight out of nine Secretaries of the Army, every Deputy Secretary of Defense, three out of five directors of the CIA and three out of five chairmen of the Atomic Energy Commission.

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